



[Human Rights Activists Criticize Trump's Warm Welcome of the Saudi Crown Prince](#)

This week, U.S. President Donald Trump elicited a wide array of criticism for his warm and lavish welcome of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) – in what marked the latter's first visit to the United States since the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. American intelligence agencies long concluded with high confidence that MBS himself approved the murder. As such, human rights activists and others denounced Trump's public hosting of the Saudi Crown Prince for prioritizing financial deals and personal family business connections over any sense of moral justice and accountability. On top of the condemnation that the mere visit itself understandably garnered, Trump also drew criticism for his dismissal of the heinous killing and his vehement defense of MBS – which contradicted U.S. intelligence findings. The American president's comments were seen by human rights advocates and press freedom organizations as highly insensitive and an attempt to justify the indefensible murder, while also emboldening further reprehensible behavior like it.

Many observers and human rights defenders also expressed concern with the visit due to the message that the grand welcoming and spectacle sent. They criticized it for providing the Saudi Crown Prince an opportunity to shed his pariah status on the global stage with no semblance of accountability for his widely acknowledged involvement in the killing of Khashoggi. The lack of consequence for what was deemed to be a state-sanctioned murder of the journalist, who was also a U.S. resident and Washington Post columnist, is a grave injustice and an alarming failure of accountability. In essence, Trump's warm and lavish welcoming offered MBS a chance to restore his diplomatic standing with a complete disregard for human rights. Additional criticism towards Trump's actions stemmed from the fact that members of his family and business organization have significant financial ties to the Saudi regime, creating a major and problematic conflict of interest where the American president's personal considerations might influence U.S. foreign policy.

Coinciding with the MBS visit, a coalition of more than 10 human rights and press freedom organizations – which included Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Freedom House, among others – released joint statements urging Trump administration officials to publicly address the Saudi regime's troubling human rights record. These organizations highlighted the severe and ongoing crackdown on free expression which has seen Saudi authorities detain and hand down long arbitrary prison sentences to human rights activists,

journalists, and political dissidents. All of this has prompted advocates and some members of Congress to call on Trump administration officials to use their leverage to demand concrete human rights reforms, rather than remaining silent and emboldening further repression. Ultimately, these individuals have criticized the Trump administration for prioritizing interests like investment deals and arms sales (including the sale of F-35 fighter jets) over serious human rights concerns.

During MBS's time in Washington, the United States and Saudi Arabia signed a Strategic Defense Agreement – elevating Saudi Arabia to the status of a “major non-NATO ally.” The agreement facilitates significant American arms sales to Saudi Arabia, with the new status designation streamlining the country's ability to acquire U.S. military equipment and reducing licensing hurdles. The deal was part of a broader set of agreements signed during the Saudi Crown Prince's visit this week, which also included ones regarding cooperation on artificial intelligence, critical minerals supply chains, and civil nuclear energy. Critics have voiced concern with the agreements, particularly those involving additional weapons sales, arguing that they reward an autocratic regime with an abysmal human rights record. These entities were quick to draw attention to Saudi Arabia's destructive military intervention in Yemen, which created one of the world's worst humanitarian crises and resulted in thousands of civilian deaths from airstrikes using U.S.-supplied weapons, and the fear that the further transferring of arms will lead to other catastrophes like this.

President Trump's prioritization of business deals while publicly and vehemently downplaying serious human rights concerns during the Saudi Crown Prince's visit this week was understandably criticized by many observers. This was especially problematic given Trump's dismissal and direct contradiction of U.S. intelligence conclusions regarding MBS's involvement in the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Rights advocates have justifiably denounced this for providing a “green light” to others to carry out egregious human rights abuses and crimes, while sending a negative signal about the United States' commitment to human rights accountability.